



State of Utah

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ARE LOGGING OPERATIONS JEOPARDIZING UTAH'S WATER QUALITY?

Study Finds Forest Water Quality Guidelines Protecting Water Quality

A recently conducted audit of logging activities within Utah has found a majority of operators using a collection of voluntary field practices that protect water quality during forestry activities. A monitoring program report shows Forest Water Quality Guidelines were properly applied 81-percent of the time and 79-percent effective in protecting forest, soil and water resources.

The Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands assessed both the degree of implementation of the guidelines and their effectiveness at minimizing or reducing non-point sources of pollution related to forestry activities. The Forest Water Quality Guidelines were developed and adopted in response to Utah's Non Point Source Management Plan for Silvicultural Activities and the Utah Forest Practices Act.

"We're generally pleased with the results of the audit," said Ron Gropp, forest stewardship coordinator for the division. "While we would like to see both the application and effectiveness of the guidelines increase as we continue our monitoring efforts, we note that in most instances where we found problems those impacts to forest, soil or water resources represented only minor departures.

"Our outlook is for a positive trend as operators and landowners become more aware of the importance of practicing good forest management," he added. "Continued monitoring and education are key to protecting water quality in Utah."

Assessment teams looked at 40 sites on state and private lands across the state that had been harvested from 2002 to 2005. More than 1,500 applicable forest practices, ranging from road building to protecting important streamside management zones, were evaluated. Findings are based primarily on visual assessments and professional judgment through a consensus-based methodology.

A 1996 Utah Forest Practices Task Force noted that timber harvesting on Utah's non-federal lands was increasing and expected that trend to continue as wood product demand increased. Conducted improperly, timber harvesting can lead to degradation including soil erosion, sedimentation and decline in water quality.

Prior to 2001, timber harvesting activities in Utah were largely unchecked as there was no requirement for operators or land owners to notify the division of their intentions to harvest timber. In 2001 lawmakers enacted the Utah Forest Practices Act that provided the mechanism for the division to monitor such activities.

A copy of the report may be obtained by contacting the Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands at 801-538-5555 or go online at www.ffsl.utah.gov.

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